

Reigate Heath users survey spring 2016



“It is a treasure for Reigate residents and is part of the legacy of living in the area”.

Survey

The survey link was distributed through a postcard delivered to 1,000 homes near Reigate Heath and to members of the organisations that have an interest in the area. It was also advertised on social media, Twitter and Facebook. Visitors of the Heath car parks also received postcard to capture non-local users. It received 635 responses mainly from the local area, from slightly more men than women and from a good range of age groups, besides those under 25 year olds. This response rate was considerably higher than the last consultation of Reigate Heath users.

Visit the Heath

People visit the Heath for a wide range of reasons.

The survey shows people describe themselves under several categories, so people may play golf and walk their dog and visit the church. The highest categories of respondents:

- 60% to exercise walk or run, with another 6% attending an organised walk or tour.
- 40% dog walking
- 40% for golfing
- 31% using the golf club house facilities
- 21% watching wildlife
- 20% meeting with friends and family
- 14% visiting the Heath Church in the windmill

Other activities are obviously popular but have smaller numbers of respondents.

Around 80% of those polled had visited in the last month.

- 16% of those visiting every day
- 44% saying they visited at least once a week.

Almost 63% respondents use the Heath on both weekdays and weekends. With 25-46 year olds more likely to visit just on weekends.

Beyond those who live on the Heath, about 61% of people have a relatively short stay of 1 to 2 hours, with golfers tending to stay longer.

Who has stopped visiting?

A small number of people (51) had stopped visiting the Heath We asked them why. A few people dislike the changes, some have trouble finding parking spaces, other comments suggest their main reasons for stopping are that it is too noisy and crowded and for a few there is too much dog poo or too much golf.

Getting to and around the Heath

People were asked generally how do you travel to the Heath. They were given the option to give more than one choice. The majority of responses were for car travel with almost 75% using some form of motorised transport some of the time. 40% of the responses were for walking, 10% for cycling and 5% horseback and or in Horseboxes. Almost no one comes by public transport.

As would be expected from such frequent visitors 95% report that they find it fairly or very, easy to find their way around the Heath.

Because of this it is also not surprising that there is not a great deal of support for the use of a route map app for mobile phones or route direction signs for specific activities. Only 38% being very or fairly likely to use route direction signs for specific activities and only 25% being very or fairly likely to use a route map app for mobile phones.

When asked would respondents like to see route direction signs on Reigate Heath and to specify the relevant activity and suggest possible locations. Only about 29% of total respondents gave an answer to this question and of those a further 16% said, they didn't want to see more signs.

The respondents gave a range of suggestions. Many were around getting better signage and routes for walkers and making walkers and other Heath users aware of the golf course fairways and greens, direction of play and to generally be aware of golfers playing. There are also suggestions of marked routes for dog walkers possibly with dog poo bins close by.

There are also requests for signage for bridle ways and routes for cyclists as it is reported not to be always clear where cyclist can go and what routes and paths can be used and by whom.

As most people say they know their way around the Heath the number proposing signs might suggest that people think other people are not as sure about correct use of the area. This may be around the competing uses made of the Heath.

Safety

84% of respondents reported feeling very safe or safe on the Heath with only 3% having any concerns about safety and some of those are explained as concerns about golf balls.

Dog Waste bins

Around 40% of the respondents walk dogs. Of these most only walk one or two dogs at a time.

When people were polled about the location of the current dog waste bins a large number of people selected the neutral response to the question, who you might assume were people who do not take dogs for a walk on the Heath.

20% of the total respondents think that they are satisfied or very satisfied with where the bins are now, with only 11% thinking they are in unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory positions. 27% of all the respondents wanted to help identify good locations, though a lot just stated they wanted more bins without saying where.

There were a good few locations mentioned and it may be worth investigating them further. Several people said that about 50 yards (30 meters approx.) along the main path from the car park was where dogs naturally stop. Another quite popular spot was by the golf clubhouse car park and a range of different greens and freeway locations were suggested. There were several advocates for a bin at the start of Bonny's Road.

Bridleways

7% of respondents ride horses or ponies, which is close to the percentage that rides bikes.

We asked for riders' opinions about the safety and maintenance of bridleways and permitted horse rides. 71 people responded with 61% saying that no, the bridleways and permitted horse rides were not well maintained and safe. Whilst 39% say yes. The bridleway by the Skimmington Castle gets particular mention about the mud and is described as very difficult for walkers too. The new bridle path down the side of the Heath is described as both too hard and too narrow.

We asked cyclists if they knew that cycling is only permitted on Bonny's road bridleway. 174 cyclists responded with 60% of them saying they were not aware.

Designations

We also wanted to know if people were aware of the different designations the Heath has. (See below) Most know that it is common land and least know about it being an area of great landscape value.

Before taking part in this survey, were you aware that the following nationally recognised designations apply to some or all parts of Reigate Heath and some earth structures and buildings on the Heath?				
Answer Options	Was aware	Was not aware	Term is new to me	Response Count
Common Land	535	76	11	622
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	413	185	26	624
Local Nature Reserve	308	281	18	607
Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV)	201	278	124	603
Metropolitan Green Belt	360	187	49	596
Conservation Area	456	143	8	607
Scheduled Ancient Monuments	319	264	26	609
Grade II* and Grade II Listed Buildings	390	207	10	607
<i>answered question</i>				631

Surrey Hills area of outstanding natural beauty

Respondents were also asked about the proposal that Reigate Heath be included within a boundary extension of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a nationally designated landscape and covers an area of the North Downs, north of Reigate Heath.

- 73% either agree or strongly agree it should be included.

How aware were you?

The respondents also were asked about how aware they were about who owns and manages Reigate Heath and some of what is allowed or happens on it.

Before taking part in this survey, which (if any) of the following were you aware of			
Answer Options	Yes	No	Response Count
Reigate Heath is managed by Reigate & Banstead Borough Council	570	58	628
Reigate Heath has a management plan	387	231	618
Part of Reigate Heath is leased to Reigate Heath Golf Club	604	25	629
There are two or more "guided" walks on Reigate Heath each year	192	418	610
Motor vehicles are not permitted on Reigate Heath (except in car parks)	592	35	627
Cycling is not permitted on Reigate Heath except on Bonny's Road bridleway	321	299	620
Bylaws for Reigate Heath are posted on notice boards in the car parks	373	247	620
	<i>answered question</i>		632
	<i>skipped question</i>		3

Reigate Heath management plan points of greatest importance

To help shape the new management plan we asked respondents to say which of the points were of the greatest importance.

The rating average works out the strength of feeling including neutral and unimportant and very unimportant scorers. The lower the score the greater the importance given to it by the respondents. So the nearer the score to 1 the higher the importance over all.

To guide the preparation of future management plans please identify which of the points are of greatest importance to you as a user of Reigate Heath. Using the scale below, to mark all those that you consider important and to what extent?

Answer Options	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Rating average	Count
The competing demands of activities sharing the same areas on Reigate Heath	322	221	58	15	0	1.62	616
Overuse of Car park areas	161	250	143	42	13	2.17	609
Habitat management, after 2020 e.g., removal and/or retention of trees, shrubs, plants	288	260	50	13	6	1.69	617
Improved sport facilities	77	125	212	115	75	2.98	604
More information being available about Reigate Heath on the Heath's noticeboards	130	248	178	42	13	2.28	611
Managing Reigate Heath's diverse landscape	313	272	26	4	1	1.55	616
Maintaining the number of seats	130	245	167	49	18	2.31	609
Putting Wildlife's needs first	262	233	99	14	6	1.81	614
						<i>answered question</i>	632
						<i>skipped question</i>	3

Reigate Heath management plan points of greatest importance

Currently managing the Heath's diverse landscape is considered most important by respondents. With 95% (having a rating average of 1.55) of those polled thinking it is important or very important.

Followed by 88% (having a rating average of 1.62) of those polled recognising the competing demands of activities sharing the same areas of Reigate Heath as important or very important and with a high neutral score and low unimportant and very unimportant score.

89% (having a rating average of 1.69) think that the habitat management after 2020 e.g. removal and/ or retention of trees shrubs and plants is important or very important but having a broader range of neutral or consider unimportant.

Whilst 81% (a rating average of 1.81) think putting wildlife's needs first is important or very important.

With over use of car parks coming next with 67% of respondents wanting more information being available about Reigate Heath on the Heath noticeboards and maintaining the number of seats received 61% whilst only 34% polled think improved sports facilities is important or very important.

Selling of wood and sponsoring seats

We also asked if those polled would support the selling of wood that had been felled 74% agreed or agreed strongly. Also 69% agree or strongly agree that any additional seating provided should be sponsored.

Additional comments

There were 251 additional comments covering a wide range of topics, which have been group together .

Issues from shared use of the Heath

The largest number 84, were around shared use and the issues this can produce. Golfers have suggested earlier in the survey that more signage is needed and other respondents said “Generally the golfer’s walker’s dog walkers and horse riders co-exist peacefully. Providing information to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities towards other users and the natural heritage should be a priority.”

“It would be good to attend a forum to ensure golfers, horse riders, walkers and especially dog walkers are in agreement on how to use the heath together amicably”

Though most people responded to the question on safety feel generally safe on the Heath, many commented about feeling unsafe as they use the footpaths crossing the fairways and paths beside them. They are concerned about poorly hit golf balls. Whilst golfers report that walkers are unaware of the direction of play and suggest designated paths particularly in some hotspots. These are not identified but this could be on the Greensand way a long distance walking path which crosses the course. Golfers comment that they pay a great deal for maintenance of the Heath so that they have invested in the site. It was suggested that the golf club should run a couple of community open days.

It has been put forward that the times when golf is not played should be more widely advertised particular to provide a time for dog to be walked without concerns.

Dogs

62 respondents commented on dogs on the Heath. Some respondents particularly those who are golfers suggest dogs should be kept on leads as dogs come onto the course, dig in the sand and chase balls. Many other users also report issues with dogs. “THE biggest issue for me by far about the Heath is the amount of dog poo either left on the ground or put into bags and left hanging in trees. It is vile and puts me off taking my children there.”

It is reported that professional dog walker use the Heath now and there is concern about how they can pick up after so many animals. A lot of people think more dog poo bins will help but there is no clear agreement about where to position them.

Cyclists

There is confusion about where cyclist can go on the Heath and suggestions they should be controlled as they use bridleways and footpaths. Some people think they should have the same rights as horse riders.

Biodiversity and trees

There is a wide range of views expressed in the responses about maintaining the Heaths biodiversity. Some people's vermin, which they would like culled is others' valued wildlife, others' heathland habitat reintroduction is others scalped land. 44 people commented about the number and type of trees felled most asking for no more to be felled, but a good few agreed with the policy to return to heathland. Others of the 44 are happy to see some trees they consider weeds removed but no other species. Several suggest that the felling is at the behest of the golf club and some think there will be additional greens created.

Parking

Parking on the Heath is much discussed. 13% of those who responded visit because there is free parking and others mention the charges that Headley Heath and Box Hill have introduced which are reported as being £4. Several people commented on the number of horseboxes that use the car park and also on the difficulty they have in finding a space to park. There is a suggestion that the size of the car parks has been reduced in recent years. Several respondents comment on the need to repair the surface frequently. A couple of people suggest that the Heath maintenance could be subsidised if parking charges were introduced. Overuse of car parks was one of the issues of concern with 67% people thinking it was important or very important.

Management Plan

Besides the tree removal, which has been covered there are a few people expressing concern about the future of the Heath. People mention management of sand and gravel extraction, the possibility of fracking and the selling off of land. One suggests that Reigate Fen needs rewetting.

[Heath and the remaining area inside the AGLV up to the border with Park Lane and Clayhall Lane be protected by being designated AONB. This area is under constant siege for development and is vital to protect for future generations](#)

There are differing views on how the Heath should be developed in the future. Some respondents would like nature trails and children's activities, wooden sculptures, occasional refreshments in the car park and children's walks.

Several other respondents ask that it is not over manged.

One person wants a travel plan.

Communication

Some respondents say that there is not any information provided about work being carried out on the Heath and why it is carried out. This is particularly important around tree removal.

Several respondents suggested that the major challenge is to help people understand that the Heath is and for a considerable time always has been a managed habitat. One person suggests putting up Frith photos of the Heath from 100 years ago showing how open the Heath was. Perhaps the bigger challenge is to portray and help people understand what kind of habitat that is.

At a practical level people suggest more information on the notice boards

People report they don't know who is doing the work on the Heath presumably done by the volunteers. Other people report that Greenkeepers are asked not to do everyday maintenance by Heath visitors.

Doing well

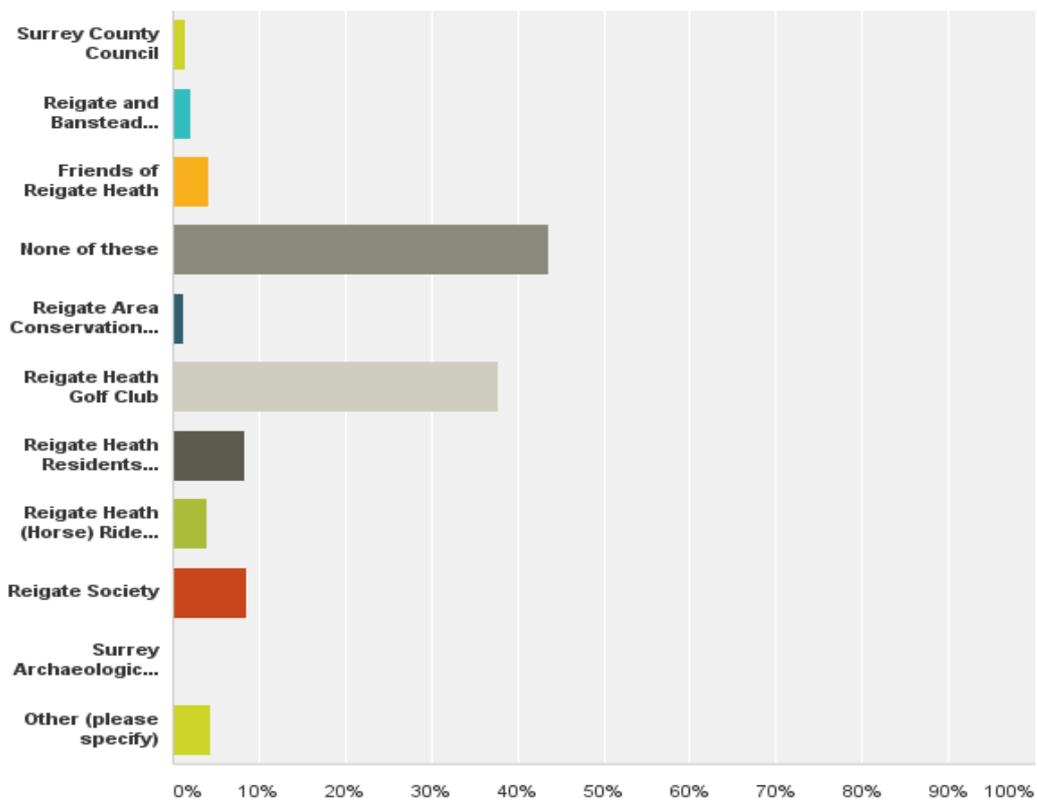
Several people commented that it is a place they value and that it is well looked after, particularly regarding the number of people who use it and the different activities that go on there.

Who responded?

We wanted to know more about the organisations that respondent belonged to see below.

Q21 Do you work for or are you a member of any of the following organisations? If more than one, mark all that apply.

Answered: 584 Skipped: 51



The Heath Church and Surrey Wildlife Trust were the majority of the Other organisations specified.

We wanted to know more about who had taken the survey and where they lived.

- 54% were men and 46% women
- 1.5% were under 25 years
- 25% between 26-45 years
- 29% between 46-59 years
- 39% between 60-79 years
- 5.5% 80+ years

Which areas

Most people lived in the local area particularly in Reigate, though Horley, Tadworth and Merstham, also polled significant responses and Leigh, Dorking and Betchworth also figure. The Golf club membership may have extended the area covered as they were almost 40 % of respondents.

Janet Hill